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ABSTRACT

The strengths and weaknesses of school-business partnerships and the need for more corporate assertiveness in the public policy area are the subjects of this paper, which is an adaption of a speech given on November 1987 to the St. Paul, Minnesota Compact Conference. The business community has two contrasting views of public education. One view is the extraordinary contribution of public education to the development and strength of the United States. The other view focuses on the problems that exist, including inadequate salary structures, poor working conditions, unsatisfactory infrastructures, and the decline of achievement. The paper outlines some of the tasks to be confronted as schools deal with a changing sociodemographic composition of the student population. Blaming the public schools for education breakthroughs is seen as incongruous and hypocritical. It is posited that school-business partnerships cannot dramatically improve the majority of the nation's public schools. Business will be most effective on systemwide issues and in the political arena by building coalitions to support major and permanent improvements in public education and by supporting candidates for elective office that are committed to doing the same. Appended is information on the Institute for Educational Leadership. (RR)

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CORPORATE ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Occasional Paper #5

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CORPORATE ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Occasional Paper #5

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The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.
Edna McConnell Clark Foundation
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PREFACE

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) with the support of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation has been exploring the evolving relationship between the public schools and the business community. IEL has been particularly interested in examining the extent of business involvement with and commitment to resolving the complex issues pertaining to educational reform.

As we pursue these important issues, we would like to share our information with interested parties from the worlds of business, education, and government.

The enclosed Occasional Paper #5, Corporate Advocacy for Public Education, is an adaptation of a speech given by Peter Goldberg in November 1987, to the St. Paul, Minnesota Compact Conference when he was Vice President, Public Responsibility of the Primerica Corporation. Mr. Goldberg is currently affiliated with IEL as a Senior Associate for Program Development. We are including this in our series because it offers a somewhat different perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of school-business partnerships and the need for more corporate assertiveness in the public policy arena. We would welcome your reactions.

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March 1989

CORPORATE ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

School-business partnerships are a powerful reminder that this is not just a pluralistic society, but an interdependent society. School-business partnerships are a reminder that no society, no matter how strong or secure it may feel at a given moment, can survive if its major institutions--including corporations and the public schools--have no contact with each other, and if its people live and work in isolation from one another and fail to see the common goals they share.

Just a decade ago the issue of an important corporate role in public elementary and secondary school education was virtually unheard of. Today it is the topic of meetings and discussions day after day in city after city throughout the country.

Why? What does the business community see when it looks at the nation's public schools? On one hand, the business community sees a unique institution whose contributions to the development and strength of this country have been nothing short of extraordinary. Public schools have provided opportunities and enrichment for millions of people who might otherwise have never escaped the traps of poverty and prejudice. The business community recognizes that our system of public school education is an important part of the American way of life and an important reason for our preeminence in the world.

But that nostalgia for the past and that vision of the future are tempered by the reality of the present. The business community also sees an institution that is no longer producing as well as it might, that is besieged by a list of problems that is long and very serious.

The business community knows that there is a problem in the teaching profession, and understands that it is not possible to have good public schools without good public school teachers. And when one looks just a little bit deeper, it is apparent that salary structures for teachers are still inadequate; working conditions border on abysmal;

opportunities for professional advancement are too few and far between. Problems of morale invariably spill over into the classroom.

The business community sees school system after school system in which many teachers are nearing retirement. It is told that the best of the new young teachers are those most likely to leave the profession earliest for other career opportunities. It has heard former U.S. Commissioner of Education, Ernest Boyer, summarize the situation as follows when he said, "Young lawyers, if they work hard, become partners in the firm. Young doctors, if they work hard get a second yacht. Young teachers, if they work hard, get old."

And, the business community has heard Linda Darling-Hammond of the Rand Corporation summarize the situation this way when she began her 1984 analysis of the teaching profession with the following help-wanted ad:

> "Wanted," it said.
>
> "College graduate with academic major (master's degree preferred). Excellent communication and leadership skills required. Challenging opportunity to serve 150 clients daily, developing up to five different products each day to meet their needs. This diversified job also allows employees to exercise typing, clerical, law enforcement, and social work skills between assignments and after hours. Adaptability helpful, since suppliers cannot always deliver goods and support services on time. Typical work week 47 hours.
>
> Special nature of work precludes fringe benefits such as lunch and coffee breaks, but work has many intrinsic rewards. Starting salary $12,769, with a guarantee of $24,000 after only 14 years."

It doesn't take a skilled corporate strategic planner to conclude that it is not going to be easy to recruit 1.3 million new high quality teachers nationwide over the next seven to ten years without implementing some changes which make the profession more attractive to enter. As a nation, we are beginning to address the teacher salary issue--perhaps not sufficiently, at least not yet--but it is important to also remember as Linda Darling-Hammond reminds us, that salary is not the only determinant of the quality of one's working life.

The business community is coming to realize that the problems of our schools don't start and stop at the teacher's desk. In fact, the teacher's desk--so to speak--is crumbling.

In school system after school system the business community sees an infrastructure that is wholly unsatisfactory. School buildings in cities around the country are aging and seem to be in decay and disrepair. And when we go inside, we see school libraries that are inadequate; science labs that are out of date.

And, there are serious concerns about the management of our public schools. The business community tends to think--right or wrongly--that school systems are too heavily weighted with administrators and layers of bureaucracy. And all too often the relationship between the school board and the school superintendent appears to be clumsy and inefficient, and sometimes much worse than that.

Finally, let's not forget the children. Until recently, academic achievement has been steadily declining. Drop-out rates persist at embarrassingly high levels. To the typical 50 year old corporate executive who got his start in the public schools, the youth of today just do not appear to understand or appreciate the value of a public education in the same way as yesteryear.

Our system of public elementary and secondary school education is confronted by many problems. And there have been many national reports which decry and bemoan what has happened to our public schools. The business community has participated in national deliberations and local actions to help make our schools better places to be in and to learn in.

But instead of reciting the standard litany of successful school-business partnerships, it may be more useful to focus on some issues that have not received the full attention they deserve; issues that illustrate more directly the enormity of the tasks still to be confronted.

First, there are many changes in the socio-demographic composition of our student population. More than twenty percent of American children live in households below the poverty level. Nearly half of the Black and Hispanic children in America under the age of six live in conditions of poverty. More and more students are coming from single parent households. For an increasing number of students, English is not the native language.

And, while there are some positive signs embedded in the data, the overwhelming message contained in the available demographic material is that the children in our school systems are increasingly poorer, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, and have more handicaps that affect their learning.

A recent front page New York Times article on poverty and youth began with the following lead paragraph:

> "Complex social, economic and political factors are creating a vast new class of poor Americans who are much younger, less educated and more likely to give birth sooner than recent generations of the poor."

The article prompted U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan to observe that the United States of today may be the first society in history where children are much worse off than adults. "It is time we realized," Senator Moynihan said, "that we have a problem of significant social change unlike anything we have experienced in the past."

One implication of this trend seems clear. The public schools, more than ever, will be looked upon as the critical avenue of opportunity for disadvantaged youth. Schools will be called upon to play a more comprehensive role in shaping the development of the young in our society than at any time during the past half century.

But, if our schools are to succeed in this task, our country must begin responding once more in a fundamental way to the deep-seated and longstanding inequities that abound in society. If our schools are to succeed, our students must no longer feel that

they have no place in this society; their experience must no longer tell them they have few opportunities outside the classroom door.

To do anything less than committing ourselves to such goals, is to place an almost impossible burden on our schools. It would be setting before them a task that no school system, no matter how well equipped, no matter how well staffed, no matter how well funded, can handle by itself.

Poverty, homelessness, hunger, unemployment, alienation and lack of opportunity do not begin in our schools. They only become more visible in our schools, because the school is where the reality of poverty and the idea of opportunity come into conflict most directly and most frequently among our young people.

To rely on this single institution called the public school to respond to injustice, poverty and lack of opportunity, is to eventually undermine the legitimate and very real educational contributions for which this magnificent institution is first and foremost responsible.

Yet that may be just where we are headed. More and more, so it seems, we hold our public schools accountable for problems they cannot be expected to solve and then blame them for failing in their mission.

For example, we routinely castigate the public schools for dropout rates that are abhorrently high as if teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and the impact of family poverty, dead end jobs and racial discrimination were the fault of the school system.

We regularly and routinely decry illiteracy, but the commitment to the purchase of books for classroom use or for the school library seems far less determined and passionate.

We belittle the public school teacher as if he or she owed something to society rather than the other way around.

And, we criticize our public schools for their failure to make education breakthroughs with the majority of disadvantaged children while at the same time we fail to increase substantially our support for such successful programs as Head Start. This has to lie somewhere on a continuum between incongruous and hypocritical.

If the President and the United States Congress want to give poor children in our society a better chance to make it in America they could begin by providing enough funds for the Head Start Program so that every child who is eligible could participate.

But the reality seems to be that we don't want to make the necessary investments in public education. Whether it is well grounded or not, public confidence in public education is still low. This disaffection translates into an unwillingness to invest the money in our public schools that is the precondition to their significant improvement. This cycle has probably been going on for at least twenty years and is crying out for a way for reversal.

The task will not, however, be easy; the numbers are against us.

The number of households with school aged children is generally declining. In 1983 there were more people aged 65 and older than there were teenagers. By 1990 the number of youngsters under age 20 will fall below thirty percent of the nation's population for the first time in history.

The fact is that a large and growing percentage of the American public no longer has an immediate and direct interest in the public schools. Unless one can make a compelling case to this population that strong public schools are in their interest too, then all of our efforts at school improvement are going to fall far short of our aspirations.

What then has this got to do with school-business partnerships?

We are deceiving ourselves if we believe that traditional school-business partnerships such as loaned executive programs, adopt-a-school programs or mentoring

programs--no matter how good they are--can dramatically improve the majority of our nation's public schools. Surely we can cite examples where with considerable private sector involvement we can turn around one school, perhaps even a couple or hundred schools and maybe even a thousand. But there are tens of thousands of other public schools and hundreds of thousands of other children who will not be touched by our efforts. What about them?

Our schools need more than what any one corporation can provide. In fact they are going to need more than what all corporate partners together nationwide can provide.

Take Boston as one example. There, in what has been hailed as an extraordinary gesture and commitment, local corporations have pooled together an endowment fund of eight million dollars of their own money to help local high school graduates get a job or go on to college. That's a lot of private sector money; that kind of commitment will not be ease to replicate elsewhere.

But the most sobering aspect of this great effort is that it will yield only about $650,000 a year in operating funds--an amount unlikely to be enough to make the needed difference even in a city of Boston's size.

Nevertheless, it appears that the most effective business community support for public education in the future will focus increasingly on system-wide issues because there are vast and fundamental improvements that must be made.

But even more than that, the business community will need to focus more attention on the political arena because that is where the decisions are going to be made about the funds, priorities and programs that will be so critical to the future of our system of public education.

There are a number of commentators who are now coming to the realization that school-business partnerships won't pay teachers' salaries. They realize that the public sector, not the private sector should be fixing the school roof and stocking the school

library. So instead of expressing simple satisfaction with the traditional forms of partnerships, more observers are coming to the conclusion that in the long run, the real measure of the business commitment to helping public education will depend upon the impact it has on the decisions that are made in our state capitols and in Washington as well as in our city halls.

This broader activist role in support of public education is not meant to minimize what has been achieved in the past several years or to trivialize any of the efforts that have gone into establishing the school-business partnerships we now have.

For example, the traditional school-business partnerships provided corporate America with a window on the world of public education. They have been a tangible and demonstrable sign of concern.

But, the question now is having peered through that window and seen that landscape, what does the business community really intend to do?

And, although there are several outstanding examples to the contrary such as the Boston Compact and the California Roundtable, the business record of public policy support of public education is at best a mixed one.

True, many in the corporate world have vigorously supported school-business partnerships. But has the business community been as vigorous in opposing public policy decisions that would harm the public schools? Business repeatedly said that its partnerships were much more than superfluous public relations gimmicks. But has it taken the steps and actions that could help provide the broader political and public policy support our schools so urgently need?

Fred Hechinger of the New York Times wrote about this dilemma in the Harvard Business Review.

". . . in the end", Hechinger concluded, "all these cooperative ventures will amount to little more than public relations unless the business community abandons its frequently

schizophrenic posture; supporting the local schools while simultaneously instructing, or at least permitting, its lobbyists to support cuts in state and federal expenditures for public education. . . Common sense . . ." Hechinger said, "should show the futility of any corporate policy that gives to the local schools with one hand and yet takes away funds with the other".

To many, Hechinger's words came as a dash of cold water on the glow of the traditional business-school partnership. But Hechinger is right. The business community cannot simply put its money where its mouth is; in the case of public support for public education, it may be more helpful to put its mouth in the halls of goverment where the necessary resources for public education must be acquired.

So, if the business community really wants to lead the effort to restore our public schools to the level of excellence they once enjoyed, then it must do more that tell its lobbyists to put in a good word for public education every now and then. It must support candidates for elective office who will vote to provide increased public funds for public education.

It must tell Washington, tell Governors and state legislators, tell Mayors, County Executives and our school boards, in clear and certain terms, that a good school system, a good school library, and good school teachers will cost more of our money and that better causes or investments in the future are hard to find.

If the business community wants to provide leadership, it must build coalitions to support major and permanent improvements in such areas as teacher training, certification and salaries, higher educational standards for students and special programs to meet the special needs of growing numbers of youngsters.

If the business community really wants to restore public schools to what they should and must be, it must help to endow our system of public education with something it does not enjoy at the present time: a base of public support that is strong, secure and

generous; one in which our schools receive--because our children deserve it--the wholehearted and unqualified support they have every right to expect from every level of government.

Finally, if the business community wonders why it should take on this new role, the unequivocal response is that a first rate system of public school education is every bit as important to our future as our national defense systems. There is simply no more valuable down payment that we as a nation can make in our collective futures than to invest in efforts that strengthen America's public elementary and secondary schools.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) has programs in more than 40 states and is unique among the organizations that are working for better schools. It is a Washington-based nonprofit organization dedicated to collaborative problem-solving strategies for education. IEL works at the national, state, and local levels to bring together resources and people from all sectors of society in a new coalition in support of essential change in schools. IEL works to develop the ideas, leadership, resources, and programs that will enable American education to meet today's challenges, and tomorrow's as well. IEL has four primary components that are the driving forces behind its work. These components are as follows.

1. **Coalition Building:** Strengthening Business Involvement in Education -- The strength and vitality of business can be traced directly to the quality of the education America's young people--and business's next generation of workers--receive in our schools. IEL forms the crucial link between the schools and the business community to establish dialogue that creates an understanding of the common interests of business and the schools. From its position as a knowledgeable but uniquely independent participant in school reform, IEL brings business and education together to strengthen both.

2. **Emerging Trends/Policy Issues:** Demographic Policy Center -- America's demographic changes are in evidence everywhere from maternity wards to advertising campaigns, but nowhere are the challenges of these changes more real or pressing than in America's schools. IEL's Demographic Policy Center, headed by nationally prominent demographic analyst Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, is working to generate greater awareness of the forces reshaping our society and to provide services that will make business and political as well as education leaders more responsive to changing needs.

3. **Leadership Development:** A Motivator for Informed and Pace-Setting Leadership -- IEL sponsors a variety of programs that serve to develop and promote leadership. IEL's Education Policy Fellowship Program gives mid-career professionals the opportunity to explore policy issues and to understand better how policy is influenced. In collaboration with the Education Commission of the States, IEL sponsors the State Education Policy Seminars Program which provides for the exchange of ideas and perspectives among key state-level political and educational policymakers. Through a variety of leadership development services to public school systems, IEL has a learning laboratory to work with school-based staff. IEL and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, jointly sponsor the National LEADership Network and work in collaboration with the 51 LEAD centers across the U.S.--with principals, with superintendents, and with other school leaders--to promote leadership in schools.

4. **Governance** -- IEL's governance work focuses on all levels of education policy and management, with the emphasis on performance and action to help local education leaders sort out appropriate roles, responsibilities, and trade-offs. Currently, IEL is working through it School Board Effectiveness Program to develop leadership capabilities and is examining various aspects of local school boards to enhance their effectiveness as governing bodies. IEL's Teacher Working Conditions Project seeks to understand and address the work place conditions and issues which promote or impede teacher effectiveness in urban school systems. This project is part of the overall national effort to professionalize teaching and to gain greater commitment to excellence in learning.

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IEL has also published four other Occasional Papers on the evolving relationship between the public schools and the business community:

Occasional Paper #1, Next Steps in the Relationship Between Business and Public Schools

Occasional Paper #2, Getting Down to Business: Next Steps in School Business Partnerships

Occasional Paper #3, Chicago Business Leadership and School Reform

Occasional Paper #4, Business Assistance to Urban College-Bound Students: Models That Work

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